I-93 Improvements

Salem to Manchester, NH

UPDATE
September 2000

Project Purpose

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The purpose of the project is to improve transportation efficiency and reduce safety problems associated with the approximately 18-mile segment of I-93 between Salem and Manchester, NH.

History and Project Status

Interstate 93, a major link in the Interstate system as well as the National Highway System, extends from Boston, Massachusetts to just north of the New Hampshire / Vermont border near Littleton, NH. The highway is an important transportation corridor between the greater Boston metropolitan area and the New Hampshire communities in the south central part of the state.

The 18-mile section of I-93 under study, as originally constructed in the early 1960s, passes through the communities of Salem, Windham, Derry, Londonderry and Manchester. As a 4-lane highway (2 lanes in each direction), its maximum capacity is in the range of 60,000 to 70,000 vehicles per day (vpd). In 1997, average traffic volumes were in excess of 100,000 vehicles per day in Salem (south of Exit 1), with segments to the north carrying between 60,000 and 80,000 vehicles per day. Motorists traveling along the I-93 corridor currently experience traffic congestion and substantial delays. In addition, this congested nature of the highway makes it less forgiving and consequently a less safe facility than it could be.

Traffic projections indicate that the average daily traffic will increase to 140,000 vehicles per day in Salem (at the stateline) by the year 2020. Traffic operations are expected to deteriorate under future conditions and motorists will experience more delay and congestion for longer periods during the morning and afternoon rush hours. The safety will be further compromised with the increase in level of congestion throughout the corridor.

To address the deficiencies of the corridor, the NH Department of Transportation (NHDOT) has undertaken a preliminary design and an environmental evaluation of alternatives and impacts within the framework of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The EIS process contains five phases.

Phase I for the project is complete and documentation of the information developed is contained in the Scoping Report published in May 2000. Copies of the Scoping Report are available in municipal offices and public libraries of the five communities through which the corridor passes.

The project is currently in Phase II, where a variety of conceptual alternatives are being considered to address the I-93 corridor needs. During this phase the conceptual alternatives are screened as part of an evaluation process. Some alternatives will be recommended for elimination and others will be carried forward for further evaluation and documentation in Phase III, the Draft Environmental Impact Statement phase.

Study Phases & Schedule

Phase I Establish Project Purpose and Need, Catalogue and Evaluate Existing Resources, and Define Range of Alternatives.

5/31/00 – Scoping Report published

Phase II Develop and Screen Conceptual Alternatives

1/15/01 – Rationale Report to be published

Phase III Evaluate Alternatives and Prepare Draft Environmental Impact Statement

11/00 to 10/01

Phase IV Public Hearing

10/01 to 05/02

Phase V Prepare Final Environmental Impact Statement

05/02 to 12/02

Final Design
01/03 to 06/06

Construction
03/04 to 09/10

Public Involvement

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Public participation is a key element in the study process. The I-93 Advisory Task Force (ATF) has been established with members representing each of the five communities through which this segment of I-93 passes and representatives appointed by each of the three Planning Commissions whose regions are affected.

Public input and direction is key to the success of the project. The ATF began meeting in March of this year and has met regularly in communities along the corridor. The meetings are advertised and open to the public and the public is encouraged to attend and participate. In addition to the six ATF meetings, four Town Official Workshop Meetings and five Public Informational Meetings have been held to better understand the needs, issues and concerns of the communities and stakeholders. In addition, in response to requests from environmental agencies, the NHDOT has recently begun holding Resource Agency Meetings on I-93 in a public forum in Derry. Again the public is encouraged to participate.

Some of the issues identified at these workshops and meetings include property impacts, noise impacts, impacts to wetlands and prime wetlands, floodplain impacts, water quality impacts, air quality impacts and impacts to wildlife through fragmentation due to the widening of I-93.

The 6th and most recent meeting of the Advisory Task Force was held on September 14th at the McLaughlin Middle School in Manchester. The subject of the meeting was the first in a series of discussions relative to ridership projections for alternative modes of travel. The intent of this area of study is to estimate how many riders might use various modes of transportation (rail, bus, high occupancy vehicle lanes) if made available. Ten different alternatives made up of different combinations of modes have been developed in an effort to evaluate what effect alternative modes might have relative to the needs of the highway and the scope of improvements to the highway.

In an effort to understand the potential of possible solutions to I-93, the NHDOT is looking at the following major alternatives:

- Widening the highway
- Improving bus service
- Constructing high occupancy vehicle lanes
- Instituting train service

The questions that need to be answered are:

- Which services should be instituted or constructed?
- How much of these services are reasonable?
- When should these services be instituted or constructed?

In addition to the highway and transit services being considered, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, park and ride facilities, and other Transportation Demand Management measures are potential elements to the solution. Intelligent Transportation Systems technology (variable message boards, highway advisory radio, real time information transfer) and Improved Incident Management (the handling of accidents) are also being considered to further enhance the mobility and safety of the corridor.

Understanding the effectiveness of the alternatives to improve the I-93 corridor transportation system and understanding the ramifications on the socio-economic and environmental impacts associated with instituting any alternatives will begin the process of reconciling what transportation improvements are most reasonable for the corridor and the State of New Hampshire.

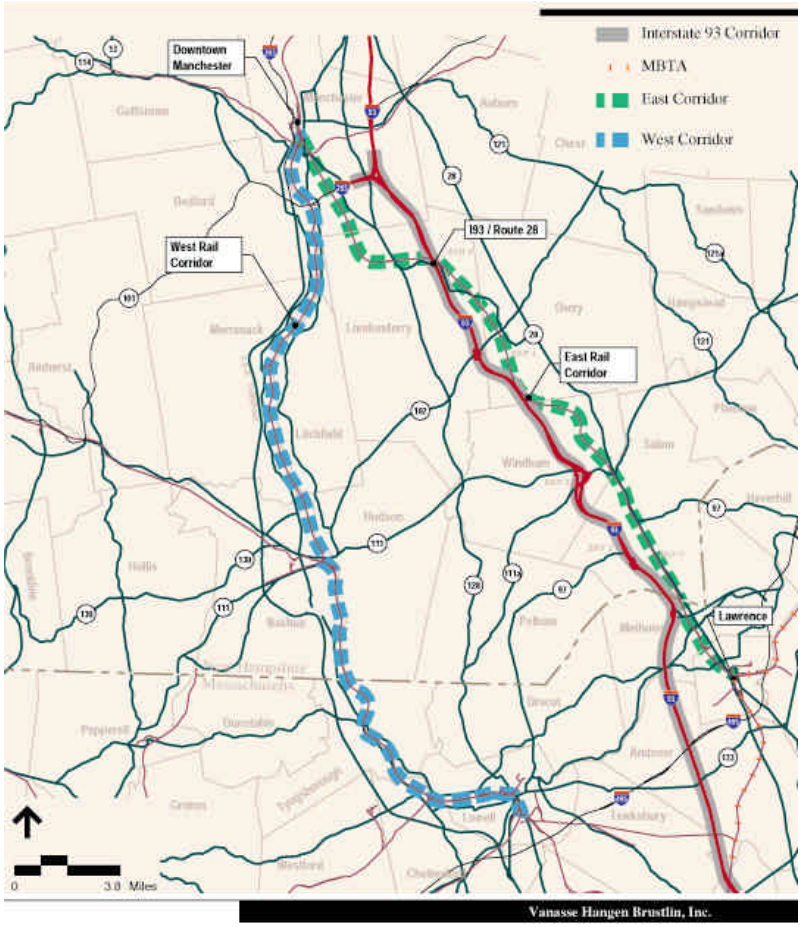
Task Force Members

Salem	E. James Turse
	Keith Wolters
Windham	Alfred Turner
Manchester	Kevin Sheppard
	Bruce Thomas
Derry	Carol Granfield
	Alan Swan
Londonderry	Andre' Garron
	Dean Kacos
NRPC	Jim Pitts
SNHPC	William Stergios
RPC	Cliff Sinott
NHDOT	Jeff Brillhart

For more information …

Contact Jeff Brillhart, NHDOT Project Manager, 603-271-6152

Coming in November …
Look for the I-93 web page on www.state.nh.us/dot



Environmental Streamlining

Because the I-93 project is a high priority project for the region and New Hampshire, US Senator Bob Smith is sponsoring an effort to streamline the environmental permitting process so that improvements can be constructed and implemented as soon as possible. Senator Smith is looking to have this project serve as the model for other projects.

Environmental agencies, focused on assuring the least impacts, are coordinating their efforts to streamline the environmental review process with the NHDOT.

In an effort to allow the public to interact with and understand the Resource Agencies' perspective as to what should be done for transportation infrastructure for the I-93 corridor, Resource Agency Meetings, normally held at NHDOT headquarters in Concord, are being held along the project corridor. The first meeting was held on September 20, 2000 at West Running Brook School in Derry.

This meeting discussed how the 2020-year ridership forecasts for bus, HOV and train service, if implemented with various highway options, would affect and potentially reduce the traffic volumes along the corridor during the peak commuter periods to ease congestion.

Additional meetings are scheduled. (See schedule of Phase II meetings in this newsletter.)

Range of Alternatives

The focus of the I-93 project is to improve an existing interstate corridor that is seriously deficient relative to capacity and safety. As part of Phase II of the study process, a full range of alternative improvements for the I-93 corridor is being considered in various combinations with each other. These options, in addition to widening the highway, include improving bus service, instituting train service and constructing high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes. It is important to understand to what extent the needs of the highway might be addressed by incorporating alternative modes of transportation.

Rail Options

- West Rail Corridor. Concept to upgrade the existing active freight corridor to provide passenger service from Lowell, MA to Nashua and to Manchester.
- East Rail Corridor. Concept to reactivate the currently abandoned rail corridor to provide passenger service from Manchester to Lawrence, MA where passenger service to Boston exists.
- I-93 Basic Rail Corridor. Concept to provide light rail passenger service in the I-93 highway corridor between Exit 5 and Lawrence, MA.
- I-93 Enhanced Rail Corridor. Concept to provide light rail passenger service in the I-93 highway corridor between the Manchester Airport and the Woburn (MA) Transportation Center. The service provides stops at industrial centers in Massachusetts, and service to Boston and points south is available throughout the Woburn Transportation Center.

Bus Service Options

- Expanded Bus Service. Concept that expands existing service along the I-93 corridor by providing stops at Exits 5, 3, and 2.
- Enhanced Bus Service. Concept to provide service along the I-93 corridor with stops in New Hampshire at Exit 5, 4, 3 and at industrial centers in Massachusetts and the Woburn Transportation Center. (The service would be similar to the I-93 Enhanced Rail Corridor).
- Bus Subsidies. Concept to provide bus subsidies similar to the rail service subsidies currently provided by the MBTA, to allow bus service to be competitive with rail service.

HOV Lane Options

- A high occupancy vehicle lane along I-93 both northbound and southbound in NH only.
- A high occupancy vehicle lane along I-93 both northbound and southbound in NH and MA, extending to MA 128/I-95.

Upcoming Phase II Meetings

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October 12, 2000 – 6:00 PM
West Running Brook School, Derry
Advisory Task Force Meeting
Ridership forecast and effects on traffic

October 18, 2000 – 4:00 PM
West Running Brook School, Derry
Resource Agency Meeting
Recommendations for transportation alternatives

Tentative: November 9, 2000 – 6:00 PM
Location to be announced
Advisory Task Force Meeting
Recommendations for reasonable alternatives

Tentative: November 20, 2000 to December 8, 2000
Public Officials Meetings in five communities
Review alternatives and project status

I-93 Improvements

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